

UPDATING THE MAP OF DESIRES: MOBILE PHONES, SATELLITE DISHES AND ABUNDANCE AS FACETS OF MODERNITY IN APIAO, CHILOÉ, SOUTHERN CHILE

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the evolution of material and discursive practices in a rural, indigenous area, showing how these embody willingness to take part in modernity. The growing importance of electronic apparatuses, and material items perceived as modern, coexists with a strong attachment to tradition in lifestyle, religious beliefs, and practices. Growing participation in the market economy, state benefits granted to indigenous people, and increased cash circulation have contributed to a change in people's values, and desires for, modern, store-bought goods. The article illustrates that the ability to buy, own, and display modern items is a response to the need to feel part of the wider society from which this rural community has for a long time felt excluded. This highlights the tension—often expressed in ethnic terms—between island, epitomizing tradition, and town, symbolizing modernity.

Keywords: Chiloé, consumption, indigenous, island, modernity, tradition

INTRODUCTION

It is midday on a Monday and I am facing a long queue in a recently-opened supermarket. The supermarket sits in the small town of Achao, the main urban reference for several rural islands in the Chilean archipelago of Chiloé. On Mondays several boats arrive from nearby, bringing islanders into town with their busy schedules and to-do lists which cover shopping, selling, and personal affairs at the council, the bank, or college. Achao, itself situated on a rural island, is usually quiet and uneventful; it becomes extremely lively, bursting with

activity on the locally termed 'boat days', *días de lancha*, when the island people visit. Achao's population (approximately 3,500 inhabitants) comprises mainly people of indigenous origin, but the town recently became popular with continental Chileans who move there for work and a healthier lifestyle. Queuing next to me is a middle-class woman who does not appear to be a local; she warns her child and me that on boat days shopping becomes irritating and protracted due to island people taking over the supermarket. From the townspeople's point of view, the islanders are distinctly visible, easy to identify: their appearance, clothing style,

manner of speaking, and even their way of walking is different. Islanders talk faster and their clothes and hair are impregnated with the pungent smoke smell coming from the stove or the *fogón* where they burn wood for cooking and smoking meat, fish, and shellfish. Being islanders means being peasants, living off the land and domesticated animals, using the sea as a resource. It also means having limited access to education, and being cut off from basic services such as centralised electricity and running water. Islanders, mostly indigenous people, regularly travel to town, where they engage with urban life, its advantages and its inhabitants, returning home in the evening with the same boats that brought them in the morning, taking bits of the town back to their island (Lazo and Ther 2014). Travelling to town implies partaking of ‘modern life’, where ‘modern’ indicates whatever is part of the town’s life, viewed as the opposite of the island way of living that I call ‘traditional’. The town, and all it offers, symbolizes modernity, while the island embodies the way of the ancestors. The tension between modernity and tradition is played out in the town / island dichotomy as the two main reference points for the islanders, who experience tradition as something safe and already achieved, and modernity as something attractive and highly desirable, but hard to attain and maintain. Tradition as life on the island and modernity as life in the town are two different ways of being in the world, the expression and essence of different identities; the islanders are apparently confined to one of the two poles but they constantly bring themselves close to the other, driven by necessity and, increasingly, strong desire.

In this article,¹ based on long-term fieldwork on the island of Apiao, Chiloé, southern Chile, I address the evolution of material and discursive practices and how these

embody participation in modernity experienced as an antithesis to tradition in a rural, indigenous region that until recently could be defined as a subsistence economy (Daughters 2016). Electric devices and material items perceived as modern coexist with a traditional lifestyle and religious beliefs and practices concerning the dead and powerful saints and witches. People maintain a strong attachment to tradition, and at the same time devote hours of hard work to earning money to buy complex and expensive technologies that are often short-lived. In this remote island community of 700 members, whose economy until recently revolved around the reciprocal exchange of local products, homemade traditional goods are losing importance while industrial goods and modern items are desired, needed, and incorporated. The increased cash circulation, growing participation in the market economy, and state benefits granted to indigenous people are contributing to a shift in what people need and desire. In what ways is this recent interest in technology significant for the people of Apiao, and what does it tell us about the local version of modernity, and the different ways to experience and interpret it? In what follows I suggest that through an analysis of patterns of consumption, and attitudes to it, we could access a local version of modernity as a contemporary and dynamic expression of indigenous identity.

Daniel Miller has long been calling for increased ethnographic attention to patterns of consumption, seeing them as extremely revealing—often more so than production—of cultural expression. He writes that ‘the key moment in which people construct themselves or are constructed by others is increasingly through relations with cultural forms in the arena of consumption’ (Miller 1998: 11). The idea that people’s identity, and even essence, is modified by intimately relating to others and

sharing their cultural practices is a constant feature in the anthropological literature on Amerindian populations. This issue will resurface throughout the article while I attempt to illustrate and analyse the pairing up of consumption and willingness to relate intimately to others as facets of the same phenomenon.

The article highlights and discusses data collected over a period of 15 years that show how people in Apiao think and talk about modernity. My use of the terms ‘modernity’ and ‘modern’ in this article reflects Apiao people’s statements and ideas about it rather than illustrating or adhering to sociological theories and definitions of modernity. The word was used widely by my informants to describe a combination of elements including urban lifestyle, technological innovations, and a way of being in the world distinct from, and antithetical to, the traditional way of living experienced on the island; modern and modernity are emblems of an alterity that, for different reasons, is considered attractive. Through a discussion of the data presented, and taking inspiration from Marcio Goldman’s recent work (2013), I intend to provide an ethnographic theory of modernity of Apiao people, highlighting its different facets and observing its features as they emerge on the island and vis-à-vis non-islanders.

Miller observed that ‘non-capitalist societies are not governed by mere utility. Material culture tends to be symbolic before it is functional’ (2012: 18). Anthropologists interested in Amerindian cultures have long been analysing the phenomena related to the possession and use of foreign, industrially-produced goods as part of everyday life, and the nuances of significance this can have for different peoples. According to these studies (see, e.g., Ewart and O’Hanlon 2007; Santos-Granero 2009; Halbmayer and Alés 2013; Ewart 2013, amongst the recent ones), the

incorporation of white / *mestizo* / Western objects and practices, far from being an instance of passive subordination to the hegemonic Other, responds to indigenous people’s conscious effort to establish a social relation with this Other. In Fernando Santos-Granero’s words, it ‘must thus be seen as the result of conscious personal or collective strategies informed by unconscious cognitive processes—a cultural disposition to consider Others as constitutive parts of Self’ (Santos-Granero 2009: 493).

As a contribution to the debate, this article investigates the meaning of certain objects considered modern by the people of Apiao and the value that owning them confers. By looking at the tension between the values the island embodies and those represented by the nearby town, it will illustrate how the islanders engage in a dialogue with what stands for modernity, and what partaking of it represents for them.

THE INTRODUCTION OF TECHNOLOGY IN APIAO

The economy in Chiloé has slowly but radically changed since the introduction of neoliberal economic strategies following Pinochet’s military coup. However, as Daughters (2009) observes, it took much longer for rural areas of the archipelago to be affected, and these continue partially to rely on traditional subsistence methods; places like Apiao are only recently experiencing the effect of the free-market economy.

Returning to Apiao in 2007 after a four-year absence, I noticed two overlapping phenomena: the seeming continuity of traditional patterns of life coupled with various changes of a technological nature. Today, technology is more conspicuous than in 2007, but not much else has actually changed on the island since my first fieldwork in 2001–2 in

terms of social values, visiting rituals, exchange obligations, religious duties, or beliefs about the supernatural. The pillars of Apiao social and religious life, consisting in strong networks of alliances and reciprocal duties with fellow islanders and supernatural beings, are as strong as they were, maintaining the same form, structure, weight, and value as before: cementing social relationships, confirming alliances between people, and guaranteeing the well being of the living vis-à-vis their dead or the powerful miraculous saints (Bacchiddu 2012).

Rural Chiloé's conventional housing aesthetics are slowly being transformed and simplified; the elaborate two-storey, wooden-tile covered buildings, that have iconically represented Chiloé's image in the last two centuries, whose style survives in the several wooden, tile-covered churches declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites, are disappearing due to the shortage of wood. Plain square huts covered by corrugated iron planks nowadays constitute the common form of housing, often provided by the state, which offers incentives to those rural inhabitants who apply for benefits. Living conditions have remained more or less the same. However, the growing presence of objects of modernity—that is, goods and technological devices that were common in the town but were rare or unheard of on the island—is now patent.

The people of Apiao have their own priorities regarding what is comfort and what it is not, choosing to concentrate on some features of modern living, while discarding others. Only a small number of households have running water: even though installing and connecting rainwater containers requires minimal effort, most people prefer to carry buckets of water for both household consumption and for their livestock. People rely heavily on rainwater, but

during summer they have to carry water from far-off wells. Extracting water is mostly done manually; only a handful of households boast a motor pump. People are little interested in indoor toilets or bathrooms either, and most houses do not have private spaces for dealing with personal hygiene. Interestingly, electricity embodies real access to modernity for the people of Apiao.

Why do some things matter more than others (Miller 1998)? What is the symbolic power behind the consumption of certain goods? In what ways do they represent an image of a desired otherness? What kind of statements do Apiao people make when they prefer to invest in colour TVs and satellite dishes rather than automatic washing machines or motor pumps?

SOFAS, MOBILE PHONES, AND SOFT DRINKS

Reflecting on the role of desire in social relationships in an Amazonian context, Steven Rubenstein wrote, 'knowledge of the West produces new desires in others' (2004: 1043). In my 15 years of acquaintance with the people of Apiao, I have seen the map of desires being significantly updated. Back in 2007, on the boat to Apiao together with the usual products brought back from the town (groceries, wheat, beverages, amongst others) there was a sofa set, a fairly unusual sight on the boat deck. Social life takes place in the kitchen, where hosts and guests share the *mate* herbal drink and food sitting on plain wooden benches around the stove. The kitchen is the only heated room in the entire house; the other rooms are either used for storage or as bedrooms; they are thus used exclusively at night. The people of Apiao are generally not interested in owning furniture, and most furniture is in the kitchen. The bedrooms contain beds and sometimes night



Figure 1. Talking on the phone in Apiao, trying to get a signal.

tables. Clothes are either hung from ropes or piled in cardboard boxes on the floor or under the bed. Of all the households I visited in 2001–2 only two had a sofa and regularly used it. Today, several households have sofas in their unheated salons, although guests are still attended to in the warm kitchen.

Mobile phones were present in 2002, albeit scarcely. Several households had a mobile phone hanging from a nail in the kitchen and it was used as a home phone rather than a mobile device, being kept in the house, always in the same spot. When I left the island in 2002 I gave my phone to my host family as a present so that they could be reached by their relatives living in town. The phone was kept in the house, on the kitchen window ledge, in the only position

where it had a signal. By 2007 the number of mobile phones on the island had increased considerably and there were now four phones in the household. The most technologically advanced one belonged to a fourteen-year-old boy. His parents explained apologetically that they had to allow him to get it, ‘because he’s such a hard worker’. His phone costed 80,000 CHP (equivalent to approximately 110 Euros at the time) and he was paying for it in instalments spread over a year. The boy was fond of his phone, which he always carried, but he never made or received a call. The phone did not have a SIM card; it had a camera, but the boy ignored this and other features, mostly using it to listen to music and to comedians’ audio clips.

In 2007 mobile phones played a vital role whenever a family member travelled to the town for shopping—a regular, bimonthly event. The night before, the travellers made a shopping list, since they were often asked to buy supplies for others; however, the following morning, several calls would be made to make sure nothing had been forgotten. They would then call when the boat left the dock in Achao to inform people of their arrival time, so that family members could get to the beach, meet them, and help carry the heavy loads. Recent trips confirmed that this habit has remained unchanged (see also Lazo and Ther 2014: 60).

There were other items of modern technology on the island. Many households had substituted the black-and-white TVs connected to a car battery with colour TVs and DVD players. People were knowledgeable about the size of their television screens, as measured on the diagonal in inches (*pulgares*), and spoke about them with pride. These devices run with a petrol generator, which also provided electricity and light for the kitchen, replacing candles and paraffin lamps. Due to the cost of petrol the generator was only used for a few hours each day.

If in 2002 only the two island schools and a few individuals had generators; in 2007 several households had them. However, they often lacked regulators, and electric surges frequently damaged appliances, wasting much money in seconds. In 2007 there were some non-automatic washing machines and refrigerators; no-one was interested in acquiring technology such as motor pumps or chainsaws. Today, owning a generator is the norm; the little black and white battery TVs in their colourful homemade wooden boxes have completely disappeared.

After technology, the most obvious addition to Apiao lifestyle was the ubiquitous

presence of colourful soft drinks in the island's households. These often substitute for homemade apple cider, *chicha*, which is more expensive and can be scarce. Soft drinks, widely available and inexpensive, are atop the list of desirable goods, followed by crisps, biscuits, and various sweets. These are offered to visiting guests, replacing home-baked bread and tortillas. Soft drinks, sweets, and biscuits are today widely used in religious rituals together with *chicha* and wine, something that would have been unthinkable prior to 2007, where all the food and drink offered was manufactured in the house hosting the ritual. The *chicha*, vested with a strong ritual significance, used to be the only alcoholic drink offered in rituals. Used to the availability of soft drinks, some children ask for them continually and imperiously. Adults enjoy them too; offering soft drinks to visitors is a sign of respect, showing the host's generosity in sharing something perceived as modern instead of traditional, homemade products. The attraction of industrially-made goods available in shops versus the traditional products that can still be found in each household is part of an increasingly visible trend illustrating people's shift from being producers to becoming consumers, common throughout Chilóe (Daughters 2016).

PARTAKING IN MODERNITY

Today the number of mobile phones in Apiao has grown significantly. Most people have modern phones, including children; expensive yet ephemeral, they are replaced frequently. Two children of my host family, aged eight and ten, each received a smartphone for Christmas. The window ledge that in 2002 held just one phone, is now home to a minimum of seven. It is still the only spot in the house with a signal—the carrier companies have not improved the reception in

the area despite the obvious popularity of this technology. Electric items have become part of people's lives. My hosts owned a colour TV, a DVD player, a laptop computer, a refrigerator, a non-automatic washing machine and two portable DVD players, used to entertain a three-year-old child.

Religious rituals are carried out as before, although with hints of modernity: besides soft drinks and biscuits, plenty of electric decorations are now used for the novena² to the miraculous San Antonio (see Bacchiddu 2011). Such decorations also adorn Christmas trees positioned in the windows. Doors are increasingly locked using modern bolts, replacing older, hand-carved bolts. People are modernizing their habits as well as their tastes. If in 2002 everyone cultivated wheat and oats, today only a few families do so, and only for the purpose of growing feed for their chickens. Everyone else prefers to buy flour ready-ground. Potatoes, however, are still cultivated in quantity by each family and still represent the island's staple food.

In 2002 there were only two motorized vehicles in Apiao, and they were used sparingly by their owners. Today, there are approximately ten and the owners offer informal taxi and freight services, charging passengers accordingly. The homemade wooden sleighs used to carry goods are seen less and less; people prefer to pay to travel quickly and with little effort. Clothing styles have been changing too. Today, young people sport fashionable jeans and brand-name trainers; women wear low-cut necklines, cut and colour their hair, and sometimes wear make-up. These changes are particularly meaningful: until 2002 women hardly ever cut their hair or showed any cleavage. Nowadays young couples hold hands or go out together publicly, which was unheard of in the past. Far from being insignificant details, all these aspects reveal a

crucial shift in people's ideas about themselves as being part of a wider social group.

Other important changes can be attributed to state-funded initiatives. Apiao is considered one of the most isolated and underdeveloped islands of the region. Most of Apiao's inhabitants are of indigenous origin, as their surnames attest. If the combination of indigeneity, rurality, and insularity exposes them to subtle and less subtle discrimination from townspeople, it also entitles them to benefits from central and local governments, which grant scholarships, housing, and agricultural subsidies,³ as well as free medical care. Until recently a travelling medical team visited the island once a month. Today, Apiao has a basic medical centre with a resident doctor, obstetrician, and nurse. In addition to two schools and a kindergarten, the island currently boasts a nursery, a school bus, and a government-subsidised passenger ferry. The school bus, a minivan driven by a local resident, collects children every morning and returns them home in the afternoon. The minivan has many modern comforts, including a DVD player for playing cartoon classics. This strongly contrasts with the situation prior to the early 2000s, when children walked to school whatever the weather, which took many of them over an hour, often in heavy rain.

Such changes, and the increase in cash circulating on the island, have rapidly changed the map of desires. If until recently most islanders devoted their work to agriculture and farming their own land—a non-profit-making activity—nowadays it is common to have one or more members of a family earning cash, either working for local boat owners, or in the salmon farming plants which abound in the Chiloé archipelago. Another common way to earn cash is by collecting and selling seaweed, a lucrative seasonal activity undertaken by people of all ages. Being able to earn cash is



Figure 2. Apiao's dock. Back from the town with the day's purchases.

opening doors that in the past were reserved for townspeople. The people of Apiao are seen by others, and see themselves, as indigenous people living on a rural island—hence, fundamentally incompatible with modernity. They are looking for ways to partake in modernity / life-as-lived-in-town despite their social and geographical isolation. In what follows, I illustrate some further instances of this phenomenon. Paraphrasing Peter Gow (2007: 69), I argue that it is not modernity that interests them, but the fact that modernity interests the townspeople.

Several Apiao houses, among them some of the smallest and most dilapidated, have satellite dishes installed on their roofs. The increasingly common presence of satellite dishes despite the lack of electricity is striking. People buy and run

expensive petrol-fuelled generators to provide electricity for their homes and watch TV; most families spend between 70,000 to 100,000 CHF monthly on fuel for 2–3 hours of electricity per day. Citizens over 65 currently receive a monthly state pension of 80,000 CHF—a substantial amount by Apiao standards. The expenses people are willing to incur to be able to access cable TV are considerable, even if they cannot afford to watch TV for more than a few hours a day. So why would they want a satellite dish? I suspect that the crucial issue is being able to access satellite TV rather than actually watching it. Speaking to various satellite dish owners, it became apparent that the possibility of watching 187 channels did not really change their habits. They always watch in sequence the

news and the *telenovela* (both one-hour shows) on the mainstream public channels. Then the generator is turned off.

Most adults lose their teeth early due to the high consumption of sugar in the *mate*. Until recently losing one's teeth was considered a fact of life, and no-one would ever have considered seeking dental treatment. Nowadays several individuals enjoy government dental care and have dentures. While a decade ago having false teeth was not a priority, people now make the effort to travel to town for the necessary treatment. Interestingly, the comments of those who boast new teeth concerned the sense of wellbeing granted by looking better rather than their practicality. '*Ahora es bonito ir a cualquier parte, con sus dientes ya es otra cosa*' ('Now it's nice to go anywhere, with one's teeth it's different now'). Those with new teeth tend to wear them only when travelling or going to fiestas or church services; they do not eat with them. Having dentures is more about looking different than being able to chew and eat properly. Teeth afford their owners a different appearance and this is what makes them valuable and desired. This is yet another example of the symbolic aspects of consumption being more conspicuous than the material ones.

Modernity for Apiao people also means access to distant places and speedy travel, including reaching relatives abroad. Chiloé is historically a region of seasonal or permanent migration to Argentina, Patagonia, and other parts of Chile (Grenier 1984). Several islanders who moved south to work and prospered return to visit, or sometimes invite their family to visit, providing plane tickets. Travelling and visiting the homes of relatives earns considerable prestige for those who have until recently never left the island. One of them asked a neighbour '*Voh tiene volao?*' ('Have you flown in a plane yet?'), proudly demonstrating that they had

partaken of technology that had until recently been totally unreachable. Being related to migrants represents a resource, both practical and symbolic.

ISLA/PUEBLO

As mentioned earlier, the main point of reference for the ideal of the modern lifestyle is Achao, the town a three-hour boat trip away. The often-repeated statement, '*nosotros somos atrasados*', ('we are backward') denotes an awareness of marginality with reference to the town, and it highlights the perceived difference between islanders and townspeople and the consequent dichotomy that is always brought up by the former: people are either island people or townspeople. According to those who have left the island, there are several advantages to life in the town: convenient access to technology, healthcare, and social services without the risk of the weather impeding travel. '*Ya es piso firme*', they say ('It's secure ground').⁴ This expression is often reiterated as a justification. But is feeling secure really a factor influencing the desire to leave the island?

Although life in town is attractive for its access to modernity, it entails having to earn cash to make a living. 'In the town you have to buy the potatoes in kilos!' a woman said once, horrified at the prospect. Life in Apiao means independence and abundance of food, provided one is not lazy. In town, one has to buy everything. Those who have made it (for example, the migrants to Argentina) are spoken of with admiration, described as lucky, and their possessions are enumerated. Yet for some the town embodies the ideal, or at least the desirable. Whenever Apiao people travel, they bring back some 'town food' to share with the rest of the family and a ritual is repeated each time upon the travellers' return. Industrially-baked bread

known as *pan de pueblo*, salami, ham, yogurt, fruit, and sweets, none of which is available on the island, are shared while the family gathers around the stove, chatting, commenting on the events of the day and the whereabouts of other travellers. Dinner will consist of roasted *pollo de pueblo*, frozen chicken bought in town as opposed to the local hens used for soups.

O'Hanlon recently observed that 'exogenous materials when locally adopted are no longer extraneous "noise" but are incorporated as part of a pre-existing system (which may of course be modified in consequence)' (2007: 5). This theme of incorporation applies to most town goods perceived as modern in Apiao, and, for example, to the novel birthday party that I could observe for a child who was turning eight. The invited guests had been given printed invitations prior to the party, a modern version of the ritual *suplica*, a formal (oral) request and invitation to participate in a ritual or a religious event (Bacchiddu 2010). After the party, each child was given a plastic plate filled with store-bought sweets as a take-away gift. The gift was an updated version of the *yoko*, the plateful of pork and processed products offered as a reciprocal gift to a network of allies on the occasion of the annual pig slaughtering. The child's parents managed to incorporate new goods (the sweets) into a traditional action (the gift-giving to guests), bringing together island and town.

There are further occasions where island and town are brought together, for example when established migrants return to visit their relatives. In such cases two different lifestyles emerge, revealing different perceptions and attitudes towards values and practicalities. Inevitably this exposes the islanders to judgment, reminding them of their rurality and of the gap between them and the townspeople. Once a family made *chicha* with a close relative visiting

from Argentina who insisted on washing the apples twice before mincing them—something that people never do in Apiao. Once the visitors left, people highlighted the remarkable waste of precious water—coming from the only, remote well in the area—entailed in washing large quantities of apples not once but twice.

The islanders often have to put up with other people's expectations of them. A woman who lives in Patagonia complained about her mother's disinterest in what she termed 'taking care of herself properly'. 'She has so many health problems, and yet never goes to the doctor; I always send her vitamins and milk from the town but she rarely takes any of it; she neglects herself completely,' she remarked, irritated.

THE NEW VALUE OF ACCUMULATION

Money and the possibilities that it offers are important topics for Apiao people. 'In the countryside we don't make much money,' a young couple told me, explaining why it took a long time to complete their house. Money is frequently a topic of conversation, discussion, and gossip. People often speak of 'getting money together' (*juntar platita*), an expression that has become a synonym of working, *trabajar*. They also discuss how to spend money, and the price difference of the same goods on the island and in the town. They talk about other people's money and the monthly incomes of those who receive pensions, what they spend and what they could save, speculating on how money will be used. When people travel, they enumerate the goods that other passengers bought, especially if bulky and uncommon items were purchased. Comments regarding money are made whenever someone moves into a new house or builds an extra hut for storage.



Figure 3. An Apiao household with a satellite dish.

Mothers are proud when their children get jobs in town and tell neighbours and relatives what they will earn, adding that it will likely increase. People also count those islanders receiving old-age or disability pensions and calculate the cash available to the respective households. People asked me if pensions in my home country Italy corresponded to Chilean pensions.

Earning money is a highly attractive option open to everyone who is willing to work,⁵ allowing people to access desirable, not only indispensable, items. The difference between needs and luxuries has shifted. Most people in Apiao eat well, work enough to afford to buy what they desire. And yet, in some circumstances, they speak of themselves as *pobres*, poor.

As explored elsewhere (Bacchiddu 2017), the way Apiao people see themselves is contingent on their interlocutors. Being from Apiao, and living there, makes its people see themselves as ‘all the same’. However, when confronted with mainlanders their perception of themselves changes; they describe themselves as ‘islanders’, ‘peasant’, ‘backward’, and, especially, ‘poor’. Even those who own more than average in terms of land and animals define themselves as ‘poor’ in contexts such as that of the town. In Apiao, no one is poor. They become poor exclusively in comparison with townspeople.

My friend Elena once told me about the Christmas gifts her three-year-old child received from relatives, neighbours, and the

school. The presents—toys, clothes, shoes, and sweets—reminded Elena of her own childhood with few clothes and no toys, except perhaps some fabric dolls distributed by the state:

And yet, we used to enjoy ourselves! Our life was very different. We didn't have much of a childhood (*nosotros no tuvimos mucha niñez*). Nowadays children get plenty of clothes, disposable plastic toys that last a day, plenty of sweets. When my sister and I were in high school, we always had the same clothes on, we never had any money. We suffered a lot. We had a classmate whose parents brought her new clothes every week. We envied her so much! She was so spoiled that she didn't appreciate it. She seemed so special then, but look at her now, she never left the island; she remained here!

My friend's reflections first compared her son's situation—filled with an abundance of items that she could only dream of as a child—to her own childhood. As a result she argued that she did not have *niñez*, a childhood. Equating *niñez* with an abundance of store-bought goods and access to desired objects, she found her (traditional and healthy) childhood wanting. The second meaningful consideration regards the fellow student who, despite seeming different from the rest because of her access to that desired abundance, never took advantage of that abundance to move on. This was a serious contradiction in Elena's eyes: what is the use of an abundance of new, fashionable clothes if life remains exactly the same?

This discourse replicated another I had heard earlier on the occasion of a teenage girl's pregnancy. Someone had commented unsympathetically on the girl's choice. 'What's the point of being so good-looking, so good

at school, if she'll be tied to the island because of her child? She could have changed her life! Instead, she will stay right there (*va a quedar alli mismo*),' they remarked. Similarly, a schoolteacher voiced her disappointment about some of her best students who, after completing high school in town, returned to Apiao instead of finding jobs and partners more suited to them in town. 'They always have the same problem: they don't want to improve their life (*no quieren superarse*); they don't want to do something different from what they have always done,' she said.

These discourses reveal how leaving the island is considered by some an advancement, *avanzar*, while remaining there represents stasis, even a step back, a refusal to progress. Abundance and moving out as progress versus staying as stagnation are categories that embody crucial elements in Apiao's map of desire for a different life, or at least a life enriched by novelties that until recently could only be dreamt of.

If *avanzar* implies leaving, how can one advance without leaving? Since migration is not an option for many, a compromise is needed to signal advancement despite staying put. Partaking of modernity, bridging the perceived gap between *pueblo* and *isla* can be done by various means. One possibility is to be able to engage in a dialogue with townspeople, as seen in the interaction between a woman from Apiao and a schoolteacher who was visiting her. The woman wanted to show her familiarity with what she thought of as modernity in an attempt to reduce the separation that she perceived looming between them. Thus she showed the teacher her recently-purchased second-hand refrigerator that had not yet been connected to the generator. Then she invited her guest to sit, adding, to justify the fact that her chairs were old (but perfectly functional), that 'one always

keeps some money to buy new chairs, and then never devotes time to it, *Dios!*' Then she showed her the tomatoes from her greenhouse, 'as big as those you find in town' that 'always grow this way here, always!' She then offered to bake bread for her regularly.

This type of negotiation shows the woman's interest in demonstrating her dual resources: the advantages of life in the countryside—tasty vegetables, fresh home-baked bread (that one cannot buy because every woman, except for the teacher, bakes it for her family)—and the modern ones. Fresh home produce is attractive to townspeople who find themselves in the country for work reasons, but it is essential to pair this up with values of modern resonance, such as the economic ability to purchase goods and the ownership of household appliances. The tensions inherent in Apiao people's ideas of modernity are such that people need to show themselves as able to compete with the town, or at least able to engage in a dialogue with it.

Some people feel the stigma of obsolescence and lack of renewal. A friend in her late sixties once complained about her old, but stable house: 'This house is so old, I'm ashamed of it whenever people come visiting,' she said. 'I'd like to destroy it and rebuild it entirely, even with light boards. Who cares, as long as it's new.' The house was well kept, immaculately clean, and solid. It did not give the impression of being old. Yet she felt uneasy about what she perceived was a weakness—an old building that had not been renovated for a while—and was feeling left behind in the general partaking of modernity. She was prepared to get rid of her stable house to build one of light planks that would have given it an appearance of modernity.

ABUNDANCE AS A FACET OF MODERNITY

The abundance that was lacking in Elena's childhood surrounds her today. She owns a little store where she sells '*de toda cosita*' ('a bit of everything'): canned goods, sweets, cigarettes, wine, beer, soft drinks, and second-hand clothes. While ten years ago there were only a handful of such stores, today these abound. People invest money in items that are always needed in Apiao and sell them for a higher price, making a good profit. Stores are usually inside the houses, part of the living space of their owners. They show that the owners do not only have enough for themselves, but also surplus to sell to others.

Advertisements of abundance, in line with a Chilean trend towards free-market discourses that, in Clara Han's words 'pervasively and powerfully saturate the everyday, politics, and the media' (2011: 25), are ever-present in Chiloé. Apiao people are bombarded with images of wealth that project an impression not just of availability but of attainability. This is evident in the radio programmes in which Chiloé inhabitants immerse themselves constantly. The radio is always on; people listen to the same few, extremely popular local stations that finance themselves publicising local businesses, and a good portion of the broadcast consists of commercials. These comprise the reading of long lists of products and their prices together with the names and addresses of the respective shops, repeated several times daily between programming units. Constantly hearing goods being listed together with their price contributes to making people aware of the abundance of those goods, and of the possibility to acquire them—even if they are not strictly needed.

By repeatedly enumerating lists of goods, radio programmes titillate people's desire and the goods cease being a necessity and become

luxury. This advertising reached its peak one afternoon with the live transmission of a gameshow from a town supermarket. For weeks, customers who had spent a minimum of 15,000 CHP could fill out a ballot. On the day of the gameshow, 30 of these ballots were randomly selected and the owner was called by phone. If they answered the call saying the name of the supermarket rather than 'Hello,' they were awarded exclusive prizes. The goods awarded, mostly electric appliances, were expensive and, in Apiao terms, modern: a carbon grill, an electric fryer, a Hoover, a microwave oven, an electric iron. The supermarket was crowded with customers holding their ballots while rural customers listened to the event on the radio. Apiao families listened anxiously to the live broadcast, hoping it might be their turn, commenting disapprovingly, 'This island never gets anything.' Those who had to work decided to stay home and listen, 'just in case'. The possibility of winning seemed close, and the programme was a topic of conversation amongst neighbours for days.

Most prizes offered would have been of little use in Apiao: no one would Hoover the floor, or microwave food. These objects belong to the map of desire not for what they do, but for what they allow people to do. They allow access to something else; through these objects people can make a statement and reveal something about themselves and the rest of society, a point highlighted by a number of authors in different contexts (Gell 1986; Stirrat 1989; Hugh-Jones 1992; Miller 1998 and 2012; Gow 2007; Ewart 2007 and 2013; Han 2011 among others). Evangelical missionaries understood Apiao people's interest in owning goods and converted some of them by offering them gifts of commodities (Bacchiddu 2009).

This might be the reason behind the ubiquitous presence of the Christmas trees in

many island windows at the end of the year. My friend said: 'Before, no one had a Christmas tree. Now at least we can display (*lucir*) a little Christmas tree on our window!' The Christmas tree is a perfect feature of modernity, an object that shines through a window and tells a story about the family who is displaying it.

COMMERCIAL RESOURCEFULNESS, AND WASTE

The people of Apiao are now experiencing the shift from being producers to consumers. Traditionally—and until 2002—the stress was on the resources produced in one's home and fields (food, beverages, manufactured objects) for consumption and barter if needed. The inherent quality of these products was often compared to those available in town, perhaps abundant but lacking in quality, flavour, and durability. Today a different attitude towards outside goods is shaping people's lives, and all that comes from outside is welcome; owning industrially-produced goods is seen as *avanzar*, as a movement forward. However, cash is by far the most wanted good. Today it is common to see people earning cash and immediately investing it in goods to resell for a profit. Even homemade goods needed for family consumption are often sold for cash, and sometimes have to be bought again later on. An Apiao woman who travelled to Argentina to visit her daughter took the opportunity and bought fabric to make sheets. Reselling these goods, rather than using them, was the goal—no one in the family uses sheets, preferring light blankets, considered warmer and more comfortable. The sheets are a modern object that can be desirable to some and thus convenient to sell for others.

When travelling, people often buy goods in quantity (for example, mobile phones)



Figure 4. Back from the town, bringing home the day's purchase with a homemade wooden sled trailed by a yoke of oxen.

knowing that they could easily resell them. This is becoming a common practice among young people, especially at the end of the summer when they have accumulated small cash reserves thanks to the seasonal seaweed collecting activity. Until recently the collected seaweed was sold to the same few boat owners who have been buying seaweed for decades; nowadays buyers have multiplied. They visit their neighbours and relatives to obtain the promise that they will sell their product to them, fixing the price to their advantage. Some women have also begun selling beauty products that can be chosen from a catalogue, making a profit and providing a service on the island. Any way to make money is welcome, even gathering the tabs of beverage

cans. Someone spread the rumour that in the town someone pays for these tabs. Hence people could be seen walking the island's paths keeping an eye on the ground looking for discarded cans. Adults and children alike indulged in gathering these tabs, believing that this is another way of *juntar platita*. Money is so desirable that having a child diagnosed with some learning disability has become valuable because it earns the child a grant. 'Hopefully they will find you dim-witted', 'Ojalá te encuentren tontito', a woman told her son, instructing him not to reply to questions during the psych-evaluation, or to reply incorrectly.

The recent inclusion in the world of market transactions and the ability to access goods also results in squander and waste. In this new

context of modernity, the desire for new goods is coupled with the desire to replace goods quickly and hence the practice of destroying them. This is evident in the waste that can characterise religious novenas, in the number of expensive phones bought and broken, in the careless use of expensive clothing, shoes, or electrical appliances that, no matter the cost, will be replaced, and even in the repeated phone calls that could be avoided. The Panará, a Brazilian indigenous group described by Elizabeth Ewart, show a similar attitude (2012: 182–183): they appear to have a strong interest in owning material objects—especially those acquired from non-locals—that animates passionate discussions daily. However, these objects, often acquired with much difficulty, tend to last a very short time, either because of heavy use, or because of neglect. Although the Panará strongly desire foreign-manufactured goods, these same goods seem to lose interest for them once they have been acquired and used.

An Apiao woman said she mistrusted the free dental service, and expressed willingness to save money in order to have her denture treatment ‘*particular*’, with a private dentist. The possibility of accessing private healthcare in Chile embodies the dream of social mobility (Murray 2012: 325), and often discourses of illnesses are accompanied with emphatically assuring the listener that the attention of a private doctor was sought, highlighting the storyteller’s belonging to the restricted group of citizens who can afford it. Even though the woman eventually used the free service, her discourse highlights the ability to discard something free for something that costs money; it manifests social aspirations and ambitions that contemplate the possibility to choose, spend, and waste. But are these not the usual features of modernity amongst the townspeople, who seemingly live in abundance?⁶

While the Panará seem interested above all in accumulation, and the process of acquisition, transformation, and exchange of manufactured products (Ewart 2012: 186), Apiao people’s interest lies, I argue, in the *ability to acquire* modern goods. This is seen as crucial because it incarnates the possibility of resembling the Other, or at least getting closer to what is perceived as an appealing form of Otherness, attractive precisely because for a long time it was unattainable. Resembling the Other allows Apiao people to enter its circle, to establish a communication with it.

ASPIRATIONS OF MODERNITY

Those who decide to leave Apiao say that it is a step forward, an opportunity to work and improve. They add that being *en piso firme*, on firm land, as opposed to being on an island, is safer as one is not dependent on the weather to reach healthcare if needed. Interestingly, they often replicate the lifestyle they left, minus the important resources of the beach—always relatively close on a small island—and the family or other networks of alliances. Such is the case of a member of my host family who was awarded a land grant in a rural site forty minutes away from the city by bus. She now lives there, the only carer for four children. Her isolation and the lack of established social relations make her life hard. But she has realised her aspirations, having her fields, her belongings on *piso firme*.

The differences between island and town seemed unbridgeable in the recent past. Sometimes Apiao people are confronted directly with experiences of realities that might be morphologically similar and geographically close to theirs, but are alien in practice. Such realities represent the possibility of merging the lifestyles of island and town, creating a sort of

hybrid that although appealing, is fundamentally difficult to understand. A native of Apiao, now living with her husband on the island of Laitec, in the southern part of the Chiloé archipelago, returned to visit her family. The young couple described life in Laitec and insisted, ‘There’s much modernity there.’ I asked what this meant.

Everyone is modern there, there’s no tradition left anymore, no religious novenas, it’s been a while since they stopped doing these things; nobody cultivates the land there. We fish and earn enough to buy vegetables; we don’t need to work the land. Cultivating the land is too wearing. Everyone has modern mobile phones, including children; the houses are comfortable, with hot showers, while here everything is still traditional.

In the couple’s discourse, cultivating potatoes, *sembrar*, the activity *par excellence* in Apiao, that gives its inhabitants both their identity and their everyday staple food, is compared to a lack of modernity. Laitec becomes representative of an attractive and hard-to-conceive lifestyle where cash abounds to the point that there is no need to cultivate the land. The people of Laitec see this kind of work as a strenuous, exhausting activity, a primordial pursuit that is no longer necessary in modernity.

Laitec represents a conundrum for Apiao people: a rural island, yet one that shares with the town some crucial characteristics, such as the absence of agricultural activity and the supposed availability of money. Apiao people are doubly bound to their land as this offers them not only their daily staple, but also identity and social cohesion based on a unity of purpose and activities (Bacchiddu 2009; 2012; 2017); given this, the stories they hear about Laitec sound both attractive and illusory. Owning

land and not cultivating it is unthinkable for Apiao people. They wonder if it is a feasible life choice and invariably end up commenting on the laziness of those who, like the people of Laitec, do not sow their own land. But from the Apiao perspective, the Laitec people’s neglect of their land is indicative of something more serious. The rejection of the land’s productivity is a form of suicide, and the Laitec people are akin to the perverse child of the Piro, described by Peter Gow in his seminal article (1989), who somehow invalidates the circle of food production and consumption initiated by her parents by viciously ingesting earth, a simple gesture that is seen by Piro people as an extremely dangerous act and a serious threat to their subsistence economy.

Having at their disposal an abundance of land but refusing to render it productive through hard labour is something Apiao people understand as a form of perversion as it denies the chain of reproductive life and sociality that give them their identity, their food, and their reason to be in this world.

‘THE REAL CHILOTE INDIAN’

The following account shows that there exists different levels of rurality in Chiloé and that in Chiloé, like in the rest of Chile, indigeneity is a liability. In 2001, I visited the nearby island of Quenac with a local friend who insisted I see it, ‘because it is really different’. The differences from Apiao were indeed striking. The boat passengers did not stare at me insistently and defiantly; they smiled politely and someone talked to me despite not knowing me. Several women were wearing makeup, jewellery, and watches, and had fine haircuts and manicured hands. At the dock there were street signs, and several cars came to meet the travellers. Someone was wearing sunglasses. No one

turned up with an oxen yoke, as still happened regularly in Apiao, where oxen-trained sleighs were then the main mode of transport.

Quenac boasts 99% Spanish surnames; by virtue of these surnames the locals call themselves *mestizos*. Unlike Apiao, Quenac has a *villa*, a small settlement that resembles a small town, with houses next to each other, shops, and several restaurants with lively signs and, especially, electricity. Quenac is a parish with its own priest living in the parish house near the church. The priest invited me for coffee at his sister's house, whose living room displayed an enormous colour TV with a SKY receiver; it also had an indoor bathroom with a water boiler, providing hot water to the house. Quenac's *villa* seemed more a continental town than a settlement on a Chiloé island. However, once out of the small settlement, Quenac presented its real island nature, with its rural landscape of gentle hills, scattered households, cattle, and sheep. Those who do not live in the *villa* by the dock do not enjoy the modernity of urban Quenac; their lifestyle is just like that found in Apiao.

My friend's father lived a ninety-minute walk from the *villa*, and when we first met the sun had already set, so our conversation took place in the dim candlelight. 'I hear you're staying in Apiao,' he said, with a grave expression. 'The real Chiloé Indians live there' (*el verdadero indio Chilote*'), he said, slowly, distinctly pronouncing each word. 'They are short, dark, little...it's true!' (*son bajitos, negritos, pequeños...verdad!*) and he lifted his arm, as if showing the proportions of some plant or animal species, according to an imaginary taxonomy. He then explained that in the area there were different classes of people: the *indios*, the *mestizos*, and the Spanish; then the *gringos* and the Europeans, although these last two groups were hard to find in Chiloé.

The list was in order of increasing status. The *indios* had no value in the man's eyes, and he made it clear that his lifestyle and manners were different from the *indios*: he drank no *mate*, he always sat at the table, and he ate no fish but only meat. It mattered little to him that his appearance, everyday work routine, and standard of living were absolutely identical to what I had observed in Apiao. In his opinion, his surname and his Quenac origin made all the difference.

Concerns of race and identity, clearly part of Quenac's social discourse, are hardly ever voiced or even expressed indirectly in Apiao, where most people have indigenous surnames and where those with *mestizo* surnames (based on the Quenac classification) are not interested in appearing different or expressing any difference from others. In Apiao the discourse is rather one of sameness, an emphasis on a lack of differentiation that articulates and regulates social relations (Bacchiddu 2017). In stating that the true Chilote Indians live in Apiao, the people of Quenac assert their superiority, as inscribed in their surnames of Spanish origin and their different—higher—status. They are interested in differentiating themselves from their neighbours on the basis of their surnames precisely because in their look and lifestyle they are exactly like them.

Ethnic issues emerge when Apiao people are confronted with outsiders, and this quickly acquires a distinct sense of discrimination. Engaging with alterity is for Apiao people often dangerous and painful, as I have discussed elsewhere at length (Bacchiddu 2012; 2017). It involves dealing with prejudice and preconceived ideas about their nature as islanders. Familiar with the demeaning attitudes of city dwellers towards them, they are wary and fearful of participating in hierarchical interactions and of being confronted about their

lifestyle, cultural practices, and way of being in the world. And yet, now that taking part in the market economy has ceased being a prerogative reserved to a few individuals, interaction with outsiders is becoming necessary and frequent. Interaction always involves an exchange of some sort. The people of Apiao feel they will never be perceived as equal exchange partners, for their rurality and indigeneity weighs them down. Their Indianness will always spell disparity. And yet they are slowly claiming their share of the modernity from which they have been traditionally cut off. They do this by taking part in external exchange networks, through the production and circulation of cash, and, recently, through consumption.

CONCLUSION: CONSUMPTION, INDIANNESS AND MODERNITY

The updated map of desire of the people of Apiao includes modern items increasingly thought of as necessities. These include generators, gas stoves, colour TVs, satellite antennas, refrigerators, semi-automatic washing machines, DVD players, touchscreen mobile phones, and Christmas trees with electric lights. Today the majority of households boast most of these items, which, as Stephen Hugh-Jones noted for the Barasana (1992: 52), are ‘not merely “goods” but also White people’s goods’. Only secondarily on the map of desire are running water, plumbing systems, indoor toilets and bathrooms, motor pumps for the well, blowtorches and related tools to ease the laborious process of slaughtering animals, and nautical devices to improve security and comfort in boats. People do not manifest interest in these items; they hardly talk about them and they make little effort to acquire them, preferring to

invest their resources in matters they perceive as more urgent.

As Peter Gow (1993: 333) observed, consumption of fine things—or whatever is perceived as such—mediates the definition of natives as *gente civilizada*, ‘civilized people’, versus ‘wild Indians’. In their contemporary effort to be seen as ‘civilized people’, Apiao people are caught in the predicament of having simultaneously to declare and deny their indigeneity. Proving their indigenous ancestry by certifying their surnames entitles them to the economic benefits and privileges necessary to thrive. At the same time, that same ancestry and cultural heritage is laden with negative stigma. If state benefits appear as a resource to exploit, they are also a reminder of a condition of ‘imperfection’.

Accumulation, consumption, and deliberate waste are strategies to downplay their Indianness or visibility as indios in order to be seen as equals in relations of exchange with outsiders, relations that have recently been incorporated in the Apiao lifestyle. The island, its values, and traditions are safe, but what they offer is limited; people look at the town as a dividing line between partaking in modernity and shedding the limiting constraints that being an islander entails. Returning to the people’s choice of modern items, drawing on Ewart (2007), these goods can be seen as ‘house ornaments’, just as the underwear and the condoms worn by Panará men are ‘bodily ornaments’ able strategically to turn indigenous people into whites, or townspeople. Through the use of these artefacts, the people of Apiao are creating their own version of modernity, indigenising and ‘domesticating’ (Strathern 1992) items that traditionally belonged to those who could easily and actively access the market relations: townspeople. These artefacts

are diving suits à la Viveiros de Castro, tools for moving in a medium alien to their normal one (Gow 2007: 56).

The choice of modern items to incorporate into their lifestyle is a collective attempt to overcome something similar to the ‘nudity’ mentioned by Beth Conklin (2007: 18) in reference to Amazonian Indians, which is viewed by outsiders ‘as a sign of sub-humanity, barbarism, poverty and inferiority’. The ‘nudity’ translates in Apiao as homes lacking what the Chilean middle-class considers basic attributes of modern living that belong to an established ideal of wellbeing; what the urban poor call ‘access to dignified life’ (Han 2011).

The people of Apiao know that mainlanders judge them in terms of what they own, what they buy and consume, and what they wear. Hence their efforts to be assimilated. If, as Alfred Gell remarked, ‘consumption involves the incorporation of the consumed item into the personal and social identity of the consumer’ (1986: 112), it becomes manifest how the choice of goods reflects a wish to be seen by others as proper and equal. In this sense, consumption effectively helps in reducing the sense of inequality (Stirrat 1989: 109; Miller 2012: 19).

Attitudes towards abundance—accumulation, enumeration, waste—are emblematic of the need to destabilise an image of themselves that focuses on what is lacking rather than on positive attributes. The objective is to be seen as proper interlocutors, bridging that gap between educated, rich townspeople and rural, uneducated, and indigenous islanders which is traditionally and historically enormous. Unlike the Wari’ discussed by Conklin (2007), who struggle against invisibility (in this case, specifically the risk of being seen not as Indians but as generic poor Others in today’s Brazilian society), the people of Apiao try to avoid

being seen, and stigmatised, as people of little value and education, which are attributes of contemporary rural indigeneity. In this sense, they struggle against visibility: they would prefer anonymity, they would like to be seen as ‘anyone’. Marilyn Strathern argued that ‘technology does not mediate the individual person’s relationships with society; it has come to mirror the individual person’s consumption of society’ (1992: ix). Creatively accessing modernity is the contemporary Apiao way to resist domination and engage with powerful otherness. In doing so, they continuously recreate themselves as subjects, rather than objects.

NOTES

- 1 Long-term fieldwork, commenced in 2001 with a two-year stay, was financed in part through a grant from the Regione Autonoma della Sardegna. More recent trips (2012–2016) were funded by the Interdisciplinary Centre for Intercultural and Indigenous Research-CIIR. I wish to thank the people of Apiao for welcoming me, and generously allowing me to participate in their daily lives. I gratefully acknowledge the comments of Adriana Robles, Angel Aedo, Peter Gow, Piergiorgio Di Giminiani and Joseph Tendler on earlier drafts of the paper.
- 2 Novenas are Catholic communal prayer recitations articulated over nine consecutive days. While novenas are generally held in churches, in Apiao they specifically take place in private households.
- 3 Apiao people benefit from a Programme of Indigenous Development (PDTI) instituted and funded by the local government, and by initiatives of the Institute of Farming Development (INDAP). Indigenous individuals belonging to official indigenous communities recognised by the CONADI (National Corporation of Indigenous Development) are entitled to benefits. Indigenous pupils are entitled to school grants and at Christmas the district’s mayor gifts the youngest pupils with presents.

- 4 This is not strictly true, since Achao is also built on an island, Quinchao, although a considerably bigger island of 120 square kilometres.
- 5 Laziness is always disapproved in Apiao, while hard-working individuals are appreciated and praised.
- 6 The fact that I chose not to own a television is seen by my Apiao friends as something contrary to common-sense expectations and always elicits incredulous comments. Also see Ewart 2013, where the author discusses how the Panará consider money to be an infinite resource of white people.

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